

DISCLAIMER

This Toolkit is intended only as guidance. It is not binding on EPA or any other person and is not intended to create any rights enforceable by anyone. While Regions, States, Tribes, and local permitting authorities are encouraged to consider and use the material in this Toolkit, they are free to act at variance with it.



Introduction

About this Toolkit: Customer Service in Permitting

Permits are a cornerstone of environmental protection because they spell out how regulated communities must comply with environmental laws. EPA and its regulatory partners (states, tribes, and local governments) issue permits to control facilities' emissions into the air and water, and to ensure safe management of hazardous waste.

Many people have their first encounter with an environmental agency through the permitting process. That makes customer service a particularly important part of permitting. Our customers include the general public, individuals who may be affected by the permit decision, state, tribal, and local governments authorized by EPA to issue permits, and permittees that need permits to operate.

Early in 1999, EPA announced its "Next Generation in Permitting," an action plan to move permitting towards measuring performance, while providing regulated parties with more flexibility in how they meet standards. This action plan is part of EPA's broad-based agenda for reinventing environmental protection, and it builds on the work of EPA pilot programs that have tested innovative approaches to permitting, including Project XL. The action plan and other permitting reform efforts show that EPA is committed to:

- Strengthening the role of the public in important decisions
- Focusing on results instead of procedures
- Reducing unnecessary burden

As part of our plan to reinvent environmental permitting, EPA committed to preparing a user-friendly toolkit of customer service processes and techniques for use by EPA and its partners. This toolkit, which is also part of an Agency-wide Customer Service Strategy, is the result.

Through a workgroup that included EPA Headquarters, Regions, and states representatives, EPA has endorsed four broad customer service standards for environmental permitting. These standards are discussed in Chapter 3 of this toolkit:

- We will prepare permits that are clear, fair, appropriate, enforceable, and effective.
- Our staff will be knowledgeable, responsive, cooperative, and available.
- We will work with representatives of permitting authorities to continually improve permitting processes and services.
- We will make our permit decisions within the time frames that are established for the type of permit being requested.

These permitting standards have been adopted by EPA. Other permitting authorities are encouraged to adopt these or similar permitting standards designed for their organization. This toolkit is intended to help staff at EPA, as well as other permitting authorities meet these customer service standards. Specifically, it offers tools for obtaining customer feedback and using it to improve permitting processes to meet customer needs. After this introduction, the Toolkit is organized to provide information on:

- *A Customer Service Orientation* - what is EPA's customer service program and what this toolkit is about
- *Partners in Permitting Service Delivery* — who the permit process participants are and how they interrelate as customers-suppliers
- *Permitting Standards* — setting standards by which we can gauge good customer service
- *Feedback and Measurement* — planning for and gathering of feedback
- *Responding to Feedback* — analyzing and acting upon feedback data
- *Maintaining Good Customer Service* — creating the cultural change necessary to keep customers satisfied, permit after permit
- *Customer Service in Action* — examples of what other EPA regional offices and states have done

As with any toolkit, readers of Customer Service in Permitting will need to decide for themselves which tools are most appropriate for their particular circumstances.

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